



Lentswe

la

Madikwe

A NEWSLETTER FOR AND BY THE MADIKWE GAME RESERVE STAKEHOLDERS

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Photo: C. vd Berg

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FROM THE PARK MANAGERS DESK—Magda Goosen

There are things in life that you love to do and there are things that you have to do...the challenge is finding a way to love not only those things that you love to do but also loving those annoying little things that you have to do! It is easy to love what we -the Madikwe stakeholders- are doing, when we are reading these incredible stories such as our old friend Scud's adventure, when we are out chasing rhino's and experiencing life in the bush.

The challenge come when we have to do the not so nice things and still be able to say- I love it! Times of disagreements where various outlooks on the same thing can cause annoyance, conflict and general disarray. Madikwe has become the creature that it is because of this variety of inputs and contributions from all stakeholders! Therefore we should also be accepting of the things that are less pleasant to do...

On a different note we are entering an extremely busy period in Madikwe. Considering the little nip in the air early in the morning it is clear to me that there are not to much left of summer before the season will turn. Even though no official Capture/ introductions programs have been finalized yet early indications are that we are going

In the technical department we have started with two huge contracts - one being the air-strip upgrade and the other the roads tender. In other departments we have been sending staff and especially conservation staff to the SA Wildlife College for further training, this place even more pressure on already dwindling staff numbers but the end result compensate with more motivated staff that are ready to be the foot soldiers of conservation.

Security wise we have completed the 2010 security work shop and we are working closely with SAPS and other departments of government to ensure a safe destination for our visitors. You will also be seeing more visible policing in the park and this is part of our action plan to ensure rhino security and general security in the park.

Hope you enjoy this addition of Lentswe and thanks again to everyone that has contributed!

Acting Park Manager
Magda Goosen

WILD DOGS AT WORK—Jaco Bekker

The morning started off as any other. It was bone chillingly cold and a ruthless "Afriarctic" wind cut through our bodies as we prepared ourselves for the morning game drive. The best thing about a cold winter's morning is a warm cup of coffee and the piping hot anticipation that radiates from both guest and ranger alike. What is waiting for us today?

We set off looking like Eskimo's to confront the African dawn. At first things were quiet, too quiet for my liking but we pushed on looking for fresh signs of any activity. We found some giraffe standing in the now risen sun, soaking up every last little drop of sunlight to thaw out from the previous night's cold.

My radio crackled once, twice, nothing came through I could understand. Then as if the radio finally woke up, the call was loud and clear. Wild dogs are on the plains and are set for the hunt.

I swung my vehicle around and headed straight towards them. Nicholas found them and just before I arrived he announced that they had set off at great speed after an ostrich. Soon after I arrived close to where they were last seen I had to slam on my brakes. Like lightning an adult wildebeest and a sub-adult came out of the bush running like the devil himself was after them. After a closer look I saw that there were three devils after them, they were in close pursuit and gaining quickly on the now exhausted animals. They disappeared from view and not long after we could hear the distress calls.

Below: Three wild dogs catch the first wildebeest calf (Photo: J. Bekker)



WILD DOGS AT WORK—J. Bekker



Left: With an amazing display of submission the spotted hyena managed to get in a few mouthfuls (Photo: J. Bekker)

They got hold of the sub-adult wildebeest not far from us. Then another distress call, as confusing as it was I realised that they had gotten another one. As the pack pursued the ostrich they had stumbled across a herd of wildebeest with youngsters. In the confusion the herd split up and so did the dogs, leaving the ostrich to a lucky escape. Eventually with their unbelievable stamina they ran down two sub-adult wildebeests, one in the central part of the plains and the other in the eastern part. I arrived at the one in the central part where a most disturbing scene awaited me. Raw nature was playing out right in front of us. The wildebeest eventually collapsed as a result of blood loss and shock and not five minutes after his death the first scavenger arrived on the scene. The hyena was timid at first because he knew he was alone and the wild dog could easily

chase him off. The dogs did chase him on several occasions, but in the most unbelievable show of submission and through some good acting he got onto the kill and got a bite or two from the one side as the dogs were feeding from the other. He was masterful in his approach. The Hyena is a scavenger, hunter and apparently Brad Pitt, without the looks. None the less he got what he wanted.

But the feast was to be short lived in the end. With the amazing amount of noise that the whole scene generated it was not too long before the real boss arrived. While we were watching, the dogs scattered in all directions and were gone in five seconds. With only the hyena remaining, an unmistakable shape was emerging from the tree line...

As she came out of the bush the lioness's

WILD DOGS AT WORK—J. Bekker

focus fell on the hyena and with no hesitation she charged at full speed after him. I can tell you this; you don't know how fast a lion is until you have seen it charging with intention with your own eyes. If that hyena didn't have a head start of 200m he would have been toast. She came back a moment later and took what was left of the carcass to the nearby shade and enjoyed the spoils of war.

The dogs got what they came for and with bellies full they returned to the puppies that afternoon. I was waiting for them at the den knowing that they would bring back a "doggy bag" for the pups. One by one they arrived at the den and started regurgitating huge chunks of meat for the hungry and begging little puppies. Happy and satiated they all settled down and caught up with some well deserved sleep. WOW!



Above: ...a moment later the lioness returned and took what was left of the carcass to the nearby shade to enjoy the spoils of war. (Photo: J. Bekker)

RHINO RUNAROUND—Carmen vd Berg

Being at the right time and the right place counts for many of the great sightings and special adventures I have had in Madikwe and late last year this proved to be no exception.

A radio call came through just after 7am from one of the Tswasa Water Scheme staff members that he had seen two black rhino on the border road... outside the Madikwe fence!!! This obviously generated an immediate reaction from Parks Board and Magda, Thomas, Declan and myself raced out there to assist. Donovan from Hillside Lodge and Johan from Ngau, being the closest available lodges, were already there. After a quick phone call to Captain Erasmus from the Derdepoort Border Police a roadblock was set up

on both sides of the rhino, the aim of which was to prevent them from being stressed by passing traffic and possibly running through the international border fence straight into Botswana (Like a certain cheetah did in September 2008 (see the October 2008 Lentswe la Madikwe available online at www.madikwe-game-reserve.co.za for that whole story - ED)).

On arrival, we saw, to our immense relief that these were two white rhino, an adult female and a sub-adult male. This did not make the situation any less critical, but it does help that white rhino are generally less aggressive and therefore less likely to charge and damage the vehicles that were blocking off the road on both sides. There was a report that one of the rhino seemed to



Above: A park managers nightmare... two white rhinos running down an international border, on the left of the road in the picture is Botswana and on the right is Madikwe. Both animals are still in South Africa but the helicopter is actually flying in Botswana airspace! (Photo: C vd Berg)

RHINO RUNAROUND — C. vd Berg

have an injury on it's head so the decision was made to dart both animals and walk them back into Madikwe after they were inspected by a vet. A helicopter with a vet was dispatched from Thabazimbi and arrived about 3 hours later. While waiting for the helicopter, a section of the fence was dropped so that the rhino could be escorted back into the Park.

As the helicopter flew over the rhino, the vet checked the injury, which seemed to be nothing more than a possible scratch from breaking through the fence, and instead of darting the animals; they were chased back to the dropped section of the fence with the helicopter and back into Madikwe without any problems. On further investigation we found a massive hole in the fence about three kilometers east of where the rhino were. It seems that the female and her sub-adult male calf were chased right through the



Above: Not an advert for Toyota but a road block to prevent the two rhino from heading to Botswana (Photo: C vd Berg)

Below: Finally the mother and calf returned to Madikwe through the hole in the fence that had been prepared by Johan, Don and the fencing team (Photo: C vd Berg)



RHINO RUNAROUND — C. vd Berg

fence by the dominant bull in the area. Most likely he had tried to mate with the cow and the younger bull had gotten in the way. He would've attacked the young bull and in the ruckus of the cow defending her youngster they were pushed through the fence. It's fortunate that the older bull didn't follow them because he would most likely have pushed them through the Botswana border fence as well but as it turned out it was another successful end to what could have been a disaster.

RHINO NOTCHING — Declan Hofmeyr



Above: William Jay and members of the Momentum Group pose with the freshly notched rhino just before the anesthetic drug was reversed and he went on his way. (Photo: C vd Berg)

Madikwe management want to say a big thank you to William Jay of the NWPTB Honorary Officers Association for facilitating the sponsorship of a rhino notching exercise in Madikwe at the end of 2009. The exercise, sponsored by Momentum, forms part of a plan to ensure that all of Madikwe's rhinos receive their unique notching pattern as well as microchips in their horns. This is essential in light of the ever growing threat to our countries rhino populations (18 rhino were poached in South Africa in January 2010 alone—ED). With continued pressure on public finances and government funding it is through the assistance of public/ private partnerships like this that the national asset that is South Africa's rhino population will remain safe for future generations. Special thanks must also go to Daniel Nkoe, Carmen vd Berg and Craig Catton for invaluable facilitation on the day with an extra special thanks to Dr. Emma Rambert for providing veterinary assistance at cost.

SCUD, THE ADVENTURE CONTINUES— Declan Hofmeyr

Scud, the wild dog with more than 9 lives, is still alive and going strong though it's not for lack of close calls in the last few months.

After successfully having his second litter of pups in May 2009 with Starlight, previously of the Dwarsberg pack (see May 2009 Lenstwe la Madikwe and other previous issues available online at www.madikwe-game-reserve.co.za for the full story—ED) it seemed that fate was once again going to deal him another poor hand in the form of a never before recorded event in wild dog ecology. In mid July 2009 he was seen running down Guinea Fowl Road heading south away from the densite.

He was hoo-calling (a type of contact call) and wasn't looking back.

This was unusual in itself but what Marc Lindsay-Rae of Madikwe Safari Lodge describes seeing the next day had never been witnessed before.

"I was at the New Collection Pack den site late that evening watching the three females and the pups," Marc explains, "I wondered where Scud was but it was only when six males from the other pack, the Dwarsberg Pack, arrived did I realise something was wrong. As these six males approached I honestly thought I was going to witness a



J.M. Becker 2010

Above: One of the "Dwarsberg Six" regurgitate for Scud's puppies (Photo: J. Bekker)

SCUD, THE ADVENTURE CONTINUES—D. Hofmeyr

massacre. Instead the six males ran up to the pups and regurgitated meat for them and the females.”

It seems what had happened was that the six males, brothers to Starlight (mother of the pups), Lady and Tick had evicted Scud the day before and adopted their sister's pups. It has been recorded in wild dogs of siblings rejoining sibling break-away packs after pups have been born but they don't normally feed their siblings pups unless they were with the pack during the birthing period. Fortunately for Scud and his pups Madikwe seems to reflect that old saying about Africa... out of Madikwe there's always something new.

As for Scud... well he disappeared for nearly a month. He was seen twice in the next few days heading south but after that it was only in late August that he was seen again and in the unassuming fashion that has become so typical of this wild dog he casually showed up in front of game drives one evening in the Wonderboom node, far in the west and some 40 kilometers from where he was last seen a month previously with an impala kill at his feet looking none the worse for wear.

Not content with just surviving our Scud, because I firmly believe that this wild dog has wedged himself a special place in all our hearts, set out to find a new pack. Sometime around the 25th of October 2009 he met up with the Dwarsberg pack now leaderless with no more males after the “Dwarsberg Six” left the pack in June and evicted Scud in July. Seeing the gap he stepped in and by the 31st of October he was Alpha Male of his third different pack in as many years.



Above: Scud, in the foreground with the radio collar, still alive but no doubt a few lives shorter... (Photo: M Lindsay-Rae)

SUNSET AT RONDAVEL CLEARING—Carmen vd Berg

The sun had just dropped behind the mountains as we sat quietly waiting for the lions to stir. We had seen the Lenyalo pride earlier and they were looking at the wildebeest and impala that were grazing on the clearings a distance away. But it was still too light for them to try and move closer without being noticed, so they patiently waited for darkness to bring cover from the ever-vigilant eyes of the impala.

As we sat in the gathering dusk, a small animal popped out of a hole in the grass next to us. The large round ears looked like those of a bat eared fox, but closer inspection with the binoculars, revealed an aardwolf. Guests (and guides) seldom see this strictly nocturnal, very shy creature in action as they forage for termites, their sole food source. There was great excitement on the vehicle, and even though we could not photograph it, we were still able to enjoy his presence while we waited for the lions to get up. A short distance further, another dog-like creature made his appearance, and by his shape, we immediately identified it as a brown hyena. Two scarce animals in one sighting... that was amazing!

The lions sat up and started focusing on the herd of impala and wildebeest, and as

the aardwolf disappeared into the darkness, and the brown hyena loped off, we moved closer to the pride. Suddenly, a lone female impala came running from the far end of the clearings and was heading straight for the lions. We could not understand why she was running towards them with great speed, until we saw the spotted hyena that was chasing her. Excitement on the vehicle...we may see our kill sooner than we thought! At the last possible moment, she noticed the lions though and veered off to avoid them, but the hyena ran straight into the pride. The next moment, the bush erupted with manic screams and growls as the lions rolled the hyena over and over, trying to get a bite in. Fortunately for the hyena, these youngsters were not very experienced and he managed to get away, bolting off with his tail between his legs.

As we were still talking excitedly about our luck and the turn of events, the brown hyena came running back to investigate what all the noise was about, hoping he could possibly scavenge food from someone. And he did the same thing his cousin did... he ran blindly into the pride. Another volley of screams and noises erupted from the group of lions as they tried to pin down the

SUNSET AT RONDAVEL CLEARING—C. vd Berg

brown hyena, but again they did not succeed and the brown hyena, with long shaggy coat erect, ran off in the opposite direction.

Needless to say, the adult females returned from their intentions to hunt and joined the youngsters, knowing that all the commotion had alerted every impala and wildebeest in the area to the danger and a hunt would just have to wait.

We left the clearing with the young lions playfully chasing each other, the aardwolf scurrying around in the distance, smiles on our faces and the sun setting on another incredible day in this very special corner of Africa...



Above: "The sun had just dropped behind the mountains as we sat quietly waiting for the lions to stir..." (Photo: C vd Berg)

The opinions expressed in this newsletter are those of the authors and do not in anyway reflect the official view of the North West Parks and Tourism Board.

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